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DEPARTMENT OF STATE  
ACTION MEMORANDUM

S/S

15 APR 1980

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[REDACTED] (Entire Text)

TO: The Secretary

FROM: HA - Patt Derian  
ARA - William G. Bowdler

*TR*

*WGB*

Invitation to Argentine Army Chief of Staff

ISSUE FOR DECISION

-- Whether to seek a change in the V-B-B decision to invite General Vaquero to the United States.

-- Whether to plan for such a visit in late August.

ESSENTIAL FACTORS

At a recent V-B-B meeting it was decided that Ambassador Smith invite Argentine Army Chief of Staff Vaquero to the United States. On March 18, you authorized Ambassador Smith to extend such an invitation during his visit to Buenos Aires. In her memorandum of March 28, Ms. Dodson of the NSC inquired how the Department plans to carry out the V-B-B decision. HA opposes going forward with the Vaquero program, and requests you reconsider the V-B-B decision.

During his visit, Ambassador Smith explored the possibility of such an invitation and received a positive response. At the large formal meeting in the Foreign Ministry, chaired by Foreign Minister Pastor, he mentioned our willingness to extend an invitation in general terms, without identifying General Vaquero by name, in deference to Argentine inter-service rivalries. Ambassador Smith also stated that the invitation assumed developments in regard to human rights and U.S.-Argentine relations would continue favorably. Foreign Minister Pastor responded positively, stating that he considered this a most encouraging development.

During subsequent encounters with General Vaquero and other Argentine military and civilian leaders, Ambassador Smith made clear that we had in mind an invitation to General Vaquero. They all reacted favorably.

General Vaquero's proposed host during his visit to the U.S. is U.S. Army Vice Chief of Staff, General

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BOX 8114 (2/21)

ARGENTINA PROJECT (S20000044)  
U.S. DEPT. OF STATE, A/RPS/IPS  
Margaret P. Grafeld, Director  
☒ Release ☐ Excise ☐ Deny  
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Vessey. DOD has proposed that General Vaquero be invited to make the visit in late August, the only period the JCS has available for a visit of this kind during the remainder of the year.

#### HA Position

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An official visit to the U.S. by the Argentine Army Chief of Staff would be an event of great political significance in the context of overall relations, and could have a negative impact on the achievement of human rights objectives. As the most important of the three Argentine military services, the Army bears a major share of the responsibility for the massive human rights violations which have occurred during the past four years. Extending an official invitation to the Army Chief of Staff would symbolize to the Argentine Government and to human rights groups in Argentina and the United States that we have decided to de-emphasize the priority of human rights objectives in our bilateral relations with Argentina, and to rebuild a fully normal relationship despite the persistence of abuses. Representatives of Argentine human rights organizations, including the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo, have recently traveled to Washington to voice their fears that the U.S. may have adopted such a course. We have tried to reassure them that this is not the case.

The IAHRC report on Argentina, due to be released in mid-April, is expected to be highly critical of the country's human rights performance. A subsequent invitation from us to General Vaquero could severely undermine the psycho-political impact of the IAHRC report. —

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Very serious human rights problems remain: although the incidence of new disappearances is reduced, the Embassy reported one case in mid-March and also reported that there is circumstantial evidence suggesting that the six persons who disappeared last August were summarily executed earlier this year. Two representatives of the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo told HA in April that they had been told of 17 additional disappearances since the first of the year; these cases reportedly involved individuals who had returned secretly to Argentina from abroad. They said the information is being held closely by their source, a Catholic priest who was told about the cases in confidence. Moreover, the Argentine Junta has given no indication it is prepared to take steps to provide information about the many thousands of persons who have disappeared during its four-year

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tenure. We are similarly aware of no steps to halt the practice of torture or to resolve problems in the right-of-option program. The fact that the GOA plans to process half of the 1,300 Executive detainees in 1980 means that some 650 people will remain in prison without charge or trial for a further unspecified period. Many PEN prisoners have already been in detention for three or four years.

In our view, high-level military visits are appropriate in the case of a country which has already solved its major human rights problems; in such a case a visit would symbolize our readiness to reflect human rights improvements through the development of close, cooperative relations in all fields. We do not have this situation in the case of Argentina and, therefore, recommend that the V-B-B decision be reconsidered with a view toward informing the GOA that it has proven impossible to schedule a visit in 1980.

#### ARA Position

The United States has three major interests in its current relations with Argentina: human rights, East-West security issues, and nuclear non-proliferation. Until this year our attention has been concentrated almost uniquely on the human rights aspects of our relations. The purpose of the Goodpaster and Smith visits was to bring better balance into the treatment of our interests, without downgrading the importance of human rights. Progress made in human rights in Argentina in 1979 was one of the basic arguments for broadening and deepening our relationship at this time. The proposed Vaquero visit is a part of the process of achieving better balance.

In accordance with your guidance, General Goodpaster stressed to the Argentine leadership that normalization of military relations remained our long term objective. As next steps, he suggested the possibility of increased military consultations on security issues, joint exercises, and the exchange of high level military visitors. The Vaquero invitation is consistent with your guidance to General Goodpaster and Ambassador Smith.

Argentina has continued to practice restraint in its shipments of grain to the Soviet Union and has limited other areas of interchange in its Soviet relationship. (For example, strong Soviet pressure on Argentina to enter into a joint fishing agreement

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resulted merely in an agreement for joint scientific exploration of fishing resources.) Argentina, as an act of solidarity with the United States over Iran, last week recalled its ambassador to Iran and publicly announced its dismay that U.S. hostages continue to be held. Our interlocutors at the Argentine Embassy made it clear these moves were the result of our efforts to improve relations.

There have been definite improvements in Argentina's human rights performance. Foreign Minister Pastor and other Argentine officials have stated that the practice of disappearances has ceased and that half of the remaining 1,300 prisoners held under Executive detention would be processed this year. (However, there has been one reported disappearance in Argentina since last October.) In recent meetings such as those with Ambassador Smith in Buenos Aires, human rights spokesmen were unable to cite new specific human rights violations.

ARA appreciates that major problems remain in Argentina's human rights performance. But we believe this invitation is an opportunity to reinforce the existing positive trend. The visit would be strictly military-to-military, and we would find means to make clear the continuing importance we attach to human rights improvements. Ambassador Smith conditioned the invitation to no adverse developments in human rights and U.S.-Argentine relations. To see how the situation develops, we propose that a formal invitation be deferred until early June.

Recommendation

That you approve the attached memorandum to the NSC stating that a formal invitation will be issued to General Vaquero in June for a visit to the U.S. in late August, assuming favorable developments in the human rights situation and in other aspects of U.S.-Argentine relations. (Favored by ARA, PM, S/P and DOD)

APR 19 1980 ✓  
Approve \_\_\_\_\_

Disapprove \_\_\_\_\_

Alternatively, that you re-examine the proposed visit with Defense and the NSC, with a view toward determining that a visit by General Vaquero in 1980

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would be inappropriate. (Favored by HA)

Approve \_\_\_\_\_ Disapprove \_\_\_\_\_

Alternatively, that you re-examine the question of the proposed visit after the IAHRC report has been issued.

Approve \_\_\_\_\_ Disapprove \_\_\_\_\_

Drafted:ARA/ECA:GJWhitman:HA:PFlood:mas  
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Clearances: (substance)

PM/ISO:BBurke  
DOD: Admiral Schuller  
S/AS:ALocke

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